

From somewhere out on the black, heaving Atlantic, the rapid, muffled popping of a speed-boat's exhaust drifted clearly through the night.

I dropped my book and stretched, leaning back more comfortably in my chair. There was real romance and adventure! Rum-runners, seeking out their hidden port with their cargo of contraband from Cuba.

Heading fearlessly through the darkness, fighting the high seas, still running after the storm of a day or so before, daring a thousand dangers for the sake of the straw-packed bottles they carried. Sea-bronzed men, with hard, flat muscles and fearless eyes; ready guns slapping their thighs as they--

Absorbed in my mental picture of these modern free-booters, the sudden alarm of the telephone startled me like an unexpected shot fired beside my ear.

Brushing the cigarette ashes from my smoking-jacket, I crossed the room and snatched up the receiver.

"Hello!" I snapped ungraciously into the mouthpiece. It was after eleven by the ship's clock on the mantel,

and if--

“Taylor?” The voice--Warren Mercer’s familiar voice--rattled on without waiting for a reply. “Get in your car and come down here as fast as possible. Come just as you are, and--”

“What’s the matter?” I managed to interrupt him. “Burglars?” I had never heard Mercer speak in that high-pitched, excited voice before; his usual speech was slow and thoughtful, almost didactic.

“Please, Taylor, don’t waste time questioning me. If it weren’t urgent, I wouldn’t be calling you, you know. Will you come?”

“You bet!” I said quickly, feeling rather a fool for ragging him when he was in such deadly earnest. “Have--”

The receiver snapped and crackled; Mercer had hung up the instant he had my assurance that I would come. Usually the very soul of courtesy and consideration, that act alone would have convinced

me that there was an urgent need for my presence at The Monstrosity. That was Mercer's own name for the impressive pile that was at once his residence and his laboratory.

I threw off the smoking-jacket and pulled on a woolen golfing sweater, for the wind was brisk and sharpish. In two minutes I was backing the car out of the garage; a moment later I was off the gravelled drive and tearing down the concrete with the accelerator all the way down, and the black wind shrieking around the windshield of my little roadster.

My own shack was out of the city limits--a little place I keep to live in when the urge to go fishing seizes me, which is generally about twice a year. Mercer picked the place up for me at a song.

The Monstrosity was some four miles further out from town, and off the highway perhaps a half-mile more.

I made the four miles in just a shade over that many minutes, and clamped on the brakes as I saw the entrance to the little drive that led toward the sea,

and Mercer's estate.

With gravel rattling on my fenders, I turned off the concrete and swept between the two massive, stuccoed pillars that guarded the drive. Both of them bore corroded bronze plates, "The Billows," the name given The Monstrosity by the original owner, a newly-rich munitions manufacturer.

The structure itself loomed up before me in a few seconds, a rambling affair with square-shouldered balconies and a great deal of wrought-iron work, after the most flamboyant Spanish pattern. It was ablaze with light. Apparently every bulb in the place was burning.

Just a few yards beyond the surf boomed hollowly on the smooth, shady shore, littered now, I knew, by the pitiful spoils of the storm.

As I clamped on my brakes, a swift shadow passed two of the lower windows. Before I could leap from the car, the broad front door, with its rounded top and circular, grilled window, was flung wide, and Mercer

came running to meet me.

He was wearing a bathrobe, hastily flung on over a damp bathing suit, his bare legs terminating in a pair of disreputable slippers.

“Fine, Taylor!” he greeted me. “I suppose you’re wondering what it’s all about. I don’t blame you. But come in, come in! Just wait till you see her!”

“Her?” I asked, startled. “You’re not in love, by any chance, and bringing me down here like this merely to back up your own opinion of them eyes and them lips, Mercer?”

He laughed excitedly.

“You’ll see, you’ll see! No, I’m not in love. And I want you to help, and not admire. There are only Carson and myself here, you know, and the job’s too big for the two of us.” He hurried me across the broad concrete porch and into the house. “Throw the cap anywhere and come on!”

Too much amazed to comment further, I followed my friend. This was a Warren Mercer I did not know. Usually his clean-cut, olive-tinted face was a polite mask that seldom showed even the slightest trace of emotion. His eyes, dark and large, smiled easily, and shone with interest, but his almost beautiful mouth, beneath the long slim mustache, always closely cropped, seldom smiled with his eyes.

But it was his present excited speech that amazed me most. Mercer, during all the years I had known him, had never been moved before to such tempestuous outbursts of enthusiasm. It was his habit to speak slowly and thoughtfully, in his low, musical voice; even in the midst of our hottest arguments, and we had had many of them, his voice had never lost its calm, unhurried gentleness.

To my surprise, instead of leading the way to the really comfortable, although rather gaudy living room, Mercer turned to the left, towards what had been the billiard room, and was now his laboratory.

The laboratory, brilliantly illuminated, was littered, as

usual, with apparatus of every description. Along one wall were the retorts, scales, racks, hoods and elaborate set-ups, like the articulated glass and rubber bones of some weird prehistoric monster, that demonstrated Mercer's taste for this branch of science. On the other side of the room a corresponding workbench was littered with a tangle of coils, transformers, meters, tools and instruments, and at the end of the room, behind high black control panels, with gleaming bus-bars and staring, gaping meters, a pair of generators hummed softly. The other end of the room was nearly all glass, and opened onto the patio and the swimming pool.

Mercer paused a moment, with his hand on the knob of the door, a strange light in his dark eyes.

"Now you'll see why I called you here," he said tensely. "You can judge for yourself whether the trip was worth while. Here she is!"

With a gesture he flung open the door, and I stared, following his glance, down at the great tiled swimming pool.

It is difficult for me to describe the scene. The patio was not large, but it was beautifully done. Flowers and shrubs, even a few small palms, grew in profusion in the enclosure, while above, through the movable glass roof--made in sections to disappear in fine weather--was the empty blackness of the sky.

None of the lights provided for the illumination of the covered patio was turned on, but all the windows surrounding the patio were aglow, and I could see the pool quite clearly.

The pool--and its occupant.

We were standing at one side of the pool, near the center. Directly opposite us, seated on the bottom of the pool, was a human figure, nude save for a great mass of tawny hair that fell about her like a silken mantle. The strangely graceful figure of a girl, one leg stretched out straight before her, the other drawn up and clasped by the interlocked fingers of her hands. Even in the soft light I could see her perfectly, through the clear water, her pale body outlined sharply against the jade green tiles.

I tore myself away from the staring, curious eyes of the figure.

“In God’s name, Mercer, what is it? Porcelain?” I asked hoarsely. The thing had an indescribably eery effect.

He laughed wildly.

“Porcelain? Watch ... *look!*”

My eyes followed his pointing finger. The figure was moving. Gracefully it arose to its full height. The great cloud of corn-colored hair floated down about it, falling below the knees. Slowly, with a grace of movement comparable only with the slow soaring of a gull, she came toward me, walking on the bottom of the pool through the clear water as though she floated in air.

Fascinated, I watched her. Her eyes, startlingly large and dark in the strangely white face, were fixed on mine. There was nothing sinister in the gaze, yet I felt my body shaking as though in the grip of a terrible

fear. I tried to look away, and found myself unable to move. I felt Mercer's tense, sudden grip upon my arm, but I did not, could not, look at him.

"She--she's smiling!" I heard him exclaim. He laughed, an excited, high-pitched laugh that irritated me in some subtle way.

She was smiling, and looking up into my eyes. She was very close now, within a few feet of us. She came still closer, until she was at my very feet as I stood on the raised ledge that ran around the edge of the pool, her head thrown back, staring straight up at me through the water.

I could see her teeth, very white between her coral-pink lips, and her bosom rising and falling beneath the veil of pale gold hair. She was breathing *water*!

Mercer literally jerked me away from the edge of the pool.

"What do you think of her, Taylor?" he asked, his dark eyes dancing with excitement.

“Tell me about it,” I said, shaking my head dazedly.
“She is not human?”

“I don’t know. I think so. As human as you or I. I’ll tell you all I know, and then you can judge for yourself. I think we’ll know in a few minutes, if my plans work out. But first slip on a bathing suit.”

I didn’t argue the matter. I let Mercer lead me away without a word. And while I was changing, he told me all he knew of the strange creature in the pool.

“Late this afternoon I decided to go for a little walk along the beach,” Mercer began. “I had been working like the devil since early in the morning, running some tests on what you call my thought-telegraph. I felt the need of some fresh sea air.

“I walked along briskly for perhaps five minutes, keeping just out of reach of the rollers and the spray. The shore was littered with all sorts of flotsam and jetsam washed up by the big storm, and I was just thinking that I would have to have a man with a truck come and clean up the shore in front of the place,

when, in a little sandy pool, I saw--*her*.

“She was laying face down in the water, motionless, her head towards the sea, one arm stretched out before her, and her long hair wrapped around her like a half-transparent cloak.

“I ran up and lifted her from the water. Her body was cold, and deathly white, although her lips were faintly pink, and her heart was beating, faintly but steadily.

“Like most people in an emergency. I forgot all I ever knew about first aid. All I could think of was to give her a drink, and of course I didn’t have a flask on my person. So I picked her up in my arms and brought her to the house as quickly as I could. She seemed to be reviving, for she was struggling and gasping when I got here with her.

“I placed her on the bed in the guest room and poured her a stiff drink of Scotch--half a tumblerful, I believe. Lifting up her head, I placed the glass to her lips. She looked up me, blinking, and took the liquor in a single draught. She did not seem to drink it, but

sucked it out of the glass in a single amazing gulp--that's the only word for it. The next instant she was off the bed, her face a perfect mask of hate and agony.

"She came at me, hands clutching and clawing, making odd murmuring or mewling sounds in her throat. It was then that I noticed for the first time that her hands were webbed!"

"Webbed?" I asked, startled.

"Webbed," nodded Mercer solemnly. "As are her feet. But listen, Taylor. I was amazed, and not a little rattled when she came for me. I ran through the French windows out into the patio. For a moment she ran after me, rather awkwardly and heavily, but swiftly, nevertheless. Then she saw the pool.

"Apparently forgetting that I existed, she leaped into the water, and as I approached a moment later I could see her breathing deeply and gratefully, a smile of relief upon her features, as she lay upon the bottom of the pool. Breathing, Taylor, on the bottom of the pool! Under eight feet of water!"

“And then what, Mercer?” I reminded him, as he paused, apparently lost in thought.

“I tried to find out more about her. I put on my bathing suit and dived into the pool. Well, she came at me like a shark, quick as a flash, her teeth showing, her hands tearing like claws through the water. I turned, but not quickly enough to entirely escape. See?” Mercer threw back the dressing robe, and I saw a ragged tear in his bathing suit on his left side, near the waist. Through the rent three deep, jagged scratches were clearly visible.

“She managed to claw me, just once,” Mercer resumed, wrapping the robe about him again. “Then I got out and called on Carson for help. I put him into a bathing suit, and we both endeavored to corner her. Carson got two bad scratches, and one rather serious bite that I have bandaged. I have a number of lacerations, but I didn’t fare so badly as Carson because I am faster in the water than he is.

“The harder we tried, the more determined I became. She would sit there, calm and placid, until one of us

entered the water. Then she became a veritable fury. It was maddening.

“At last I thought of you. I phoned, and here we are!”

“But, Mercer, it’s a nightmare!” I protested. We moved out of the room. “Nothing human can live under water and breathe water, as she does!”

Mercer paused a moment, staring at me oddly.

“The human race,” he said gravely, “came up out of sea. The human race as we know it. Some may have gone back.” He turned and walked away again, and I hurried after him.

“What do you mean. Mercer? ‘Some may have gone back?’ I don’t get it.”

Mercer shook his head, but made no other reply until we stood again on the edge of the pool.

The girl was standing where we had left her, and as she looked up into my face, she smiled again, and

made a quick gesture with one hand. It seemed to me that she invited me to join her.

“I believe she likes you, Taylor,” said Mercer thoughtfully. “You’re light, light skin, light hair. Carson and I are both very dark, almost swarthy. And in that white bathing suit--yes, I believe she’s taken a fancy to you!”

Mercer’s eyes were dancing.

“If she has,” he went on, “it’ll make our work very easy.”

“What work?” I asked suspiciously. Mercer, always an indefatigable experimenter, was never above using his friends in the benefit of science. And some of his experiments in the past had been rather trying, not to say exciting.

“I think I have what you call my thought-telegraph perfected, experimentally,” he explained rapidly. “I fell asleep working on it at three o’clock, or thereabouts, this morning, and some tests with

Carson seem to indicate that it is a success. I should have called you to-morrow, for further test. Nearly five years of damned hard work to a successful conclusion, Taylor, and then this mermaid comes along and makes my experiment appear about as important as one of those breakers rolling in out there!”

“And what do you plan to do now?” I asked eagerly, glancing down at the beautiful pale face that glimmered up at me through the clear water of the pool.

“Why, try it on her!” exclaimed Mercer with mounting enthusiasm. “Don’t you see, Taylor? If it will work on her, and we can direct her thoughts, we can find out her history, the history of her people! We’ll add a page to scientific history--a whole big chapter!--that will make us famous. Man this is so big it’s swept me off my feet! Look!” And he held out a thin, aristocratic brown hand before my eyes, a hand that shook with nervous excitement.

“I don’t blame you,” I said quickly. “I’m no savant, and still I see what an amazing thing this is. Let’s get busy. What can I do?”

Mercer reached around the door into the laboratory and pressed a button.

“For Carson,” he explained. “We’ll need his help. In the meantime, we’ll look over the set-up. The apparatus is strewn all over the place.”

He had not exaggerated. The set-up consisted of a whole bank of tubes, each one in its own shielding copper box. On a much-drilled horizontal panel, propped up on insulators, were half a score of delicate meters of one kind and another, with thin black fingers that pulsed and trembled. Behind the panel was a tall cylinder wound with shining copper wire, and beside it another panel, upright, fairly bristling with knobs, contact points, potentiometers, rheostats and switches. On the end of the table nearest the door was still another panel, the smallest of the lot, bearing only a series of jacks along one side, and in the center a switch with four contact

points. A heavy, snaky cable led from this panel to the maze of apparatus further on.

“This is the control panel,” explained Mercer. “The whole affair, you understand, is in laboratory form. Nothing assembled. Put the different antennae plug into these jacks. Like this.”

He picked up a weird, hastily built contrivance composed of two semi-circular pieces of spring brass, crossed at right angles. On all four ends were bright silvery electrodes, three of them circular in shape, one of them elongated and slightly curved. With a quick, nervous gesture, Mercer fitted the thing to his head, so that the elongated electrode pressed against the back of his neck, extending a few inches down his spine. The other three circular electrodes rested on his forehead and either side of his head. From the center of the contrivance ran a heavy insulated cord, some ten feet in length, ending in a simple switchboard plug, which Mercer fitted into the uppermost of the three jacks.

“Now,” he directed, “you put on this one”—he

adjusted a second contrivance upon my head, smiling as I shrank from the contact of the cold metal on my skin--“and think!”

He moved the switch from the position marked “Off” to the second contact point, watching me intently, his dark eyes gleaming.

Carson entered, and Mercer gestured to him to wait. Very nice old chap, Carson, impressive even in his bathing suit. Mercer was mighty lucky to have a man like Carson....

Something seemed to tick suddenly, somewhere deep in my consciousness.

“Yes, that’s very true: Carson is a most decent sort of chap.” The words were not spoken. I did not *hear* them, I *knew* them. What--I glanced at Mercer, and he laughed aloud with pleasure and excitement.

“It worked!” he cried. “I received your thought regarding Carson, and then turned the switch so that you received my thought. And you did!”

Rather gingerly I removed the thing from my head and laid it on the table.

“It’s wizardry, Mercer! If it will work as well on *her*....”

“It will, I know it will!--if we can get her to wear one of these,” replied Mercer confidently. “I have only three of them; I had planned some three-cornered experiments with you, Carson, and myself. We’ll leave Carson out of to-night’s experiment, however, for we’ll need him to operate this switch. You see, as it is now wired only one person transmits thoughts at a time. The other two receive. When the switch is on the first contact, Number One sends, and Numbers Two and Three receive. When the switch is on Number Two, then he sends thoughts, and Numbers One and Three receive them. And so on. I’ll lengthen these leads so that we can run them out into the pool, and then we’ll be ready. Somehow we must induce her to wear one of these things, even if we have to use force. I’m sure the three of us can handle her.”

“We should be able to,” I smiled. She was such a slim,

graceful, almost delicate little thing; the thought that three strong men might not be able to control her seemed almost amusing.

“You haven’t seen her in action yet,” said Mercer grimly, glancing up from his work of lengthening the cords that led from the antennae to the control panel. “And what’s more, I hope you don’t.”

I watched him in silence as he spliced and securely taped the last connection.

“All set,” he nodded. “Carson, will you operate the switch for us? I believe everything is functioning properly.” He surveyed the panel of instruments hastily, assuring himself that every reading was correct. Then, with all three of the devices he called antennae in his hand, their leads plugged into the control panel, he led the way to the side of the pool.

The girl was strolling around the edge of the pool, feeling the smooth tile sides with her hands as we came into view, but as soon as she saw us she shot through the water to where we were standing.

It was the first time I had seen her move in this fashion. She seemed to propel herself with a sudden mighty thrust of her feet against the bottom; she darted through the water with the speed of an arrow, yet stopped as gently as though she had merely floated there.

As she looked up, her eyes unmistakably sought mine, and her smile seemed warm and inviting. She made again that strange little gesture of invitation.

With an effort I glanced at Mercer. There was something devilishly fascinating about the girl's great, dark, searching eyes.

"I'm going in," I said hoarsely. "Hand me one of your head-set things when I reach for it." Before he could protest, I dived into the pool.

I headed directly towards the heavy bronze ladder that led to the bottom of the pool. I had two reasons in mind. I would need something to keep me under water, with my lungs full of air, and I could get out quickly if it were necessary. I had not forgotten the

livid, jagged furrows in Mercer's side.

Quickly as I shot to the ladder she was there before me, a dim, wavering white shape, waiting.

I paused, holding to a rung of the ladder with one hand. She came closer, walking with the airy grace I had noted before, and my heart pounded against my ribs as she raised one long, slim arm towards me.

The hand dropped gently on my shoulder, pressed it as though in token of friendship. Perhaps, I thought quickly, this was, with her, a sign of greeting. I lifted my own arm and returned the salutation, if salutation it were, aware of a strange rising and falling sound, as of a distant humming, in my ears.

The sound ceased suddenly, on a rising note, as though of inquiry, and it dawned on me that I had heard the speech of this strange creature. Before I could think of a course of action, my aching lungs reminded me of the need of air, and I released my hold on the ladder and let my body rise to the surface.

As my head broke the water, a hand, cold and strong as steel, closed around my ankle. I looked down. The girl was watching me, and there was no smile on her face now.

“All right!” I shouted across the pool to Mercer, who was watching anxiously. Then, filling my lungs with air again, I pulled myself, by means of the ladder, to the bottom of the pool. The restraining hand was removed instantly.

The strange creature thrust her face close to mine as my feet touched bottom, and for the first time I saw her features distinctly.

She was beautiful, but in a weird, unearthly sort of way. As I had already noticed, her eyes were of unusual size, and I saw now that they were an intense shade of blue, with a pupil of extraordinary proportion. Her nose was well shaped, but the nostrils were slightly flattened, and the orifices were rather more elongated than I had ever seen before. The mouth was utterly fascinating, and her teeth, revealed by her engaging smile, were as perfect as it would be

possible to imagine.

The great mane of hair which enveloped her was, as I have said, tawny in hue, and almost translucent, like the stems of some seaweeds I have seen. And as she raised one slim white hand to brush back some wisps that floated by her face, I saw distinctly the webs between her fingers. They were barely noticeable, for they were as transparent as the fins of a fish, but they were there, extending nearly to the last joint of each finger.

As her face came close to my own, I became aware of the humming, crooning sound I had heard before, louder this time. I could see, from the movement of her throat, that I had been correct in assuming that she was attempting to speak with me. I smiled back at her and shook my head. She seemed to understand, for the sound ceased, and she studied me with a little thoughtful frown, as though trying to figure out some other method of communication.

I pointed upward, for I was feeling the need for fresh air again, and slowly mounted the ladder. This time

she did not grasp me, but watched me intently, as though understanding what I did, and the reasons for it.

“Bring one of your gadgets over here, Mercer,” I called across the pool. “I think I’m making progress.”

“Good boy!” he cried, and came running with two of the antennae, the long insulated cords trailing behind him. Through the water the girl watched him, evident dislike in her eyes. She glanced at me with sudden suspicion as Mercer handed me the two instruments, but made no hostile move.

“You won’t be able to stay in the water with her,” explained Mercer rapidly. “The salt water would short the antennae, you see. Try to get her to wear one, and then you get your head out of water, and don yours. And remember, she won’t be able to communicate with us by words--we’ll have to get her to convey her thoughts by means of mental pictures. I’ll try to impress that on her. Understand?”

I nodded, and picked up one of the instruments. “Fire

when ready, Gridley,” I commented, and sank again to the bottom of the pool.

I touched the girl’s head with one finger, and then pointed to my own head, trying to convey to her that she could get her thoughts to me. Then I held up the antennae and placed it on my own head to show that it could not harm her.

My next move was to offer her the instrument, moving slowly, and smiling reassuringly--no mean feat under water.

She hesitated a moment, and then, her eyes fixed on mine, she slowly fixed the instrument over her own head as she had seen me adjust it upon my own.

I smiled and nodded, and pressed her shoulder in token of friendly greeting. Then, gesturing toward my own head again, and pointing upward. I climbed the ladder.

“All right, Mercer,” I shouted. “Start at once, before she grows restless!”

“I’ve already started!” he called back, and I hurriedly donned my own instrument.

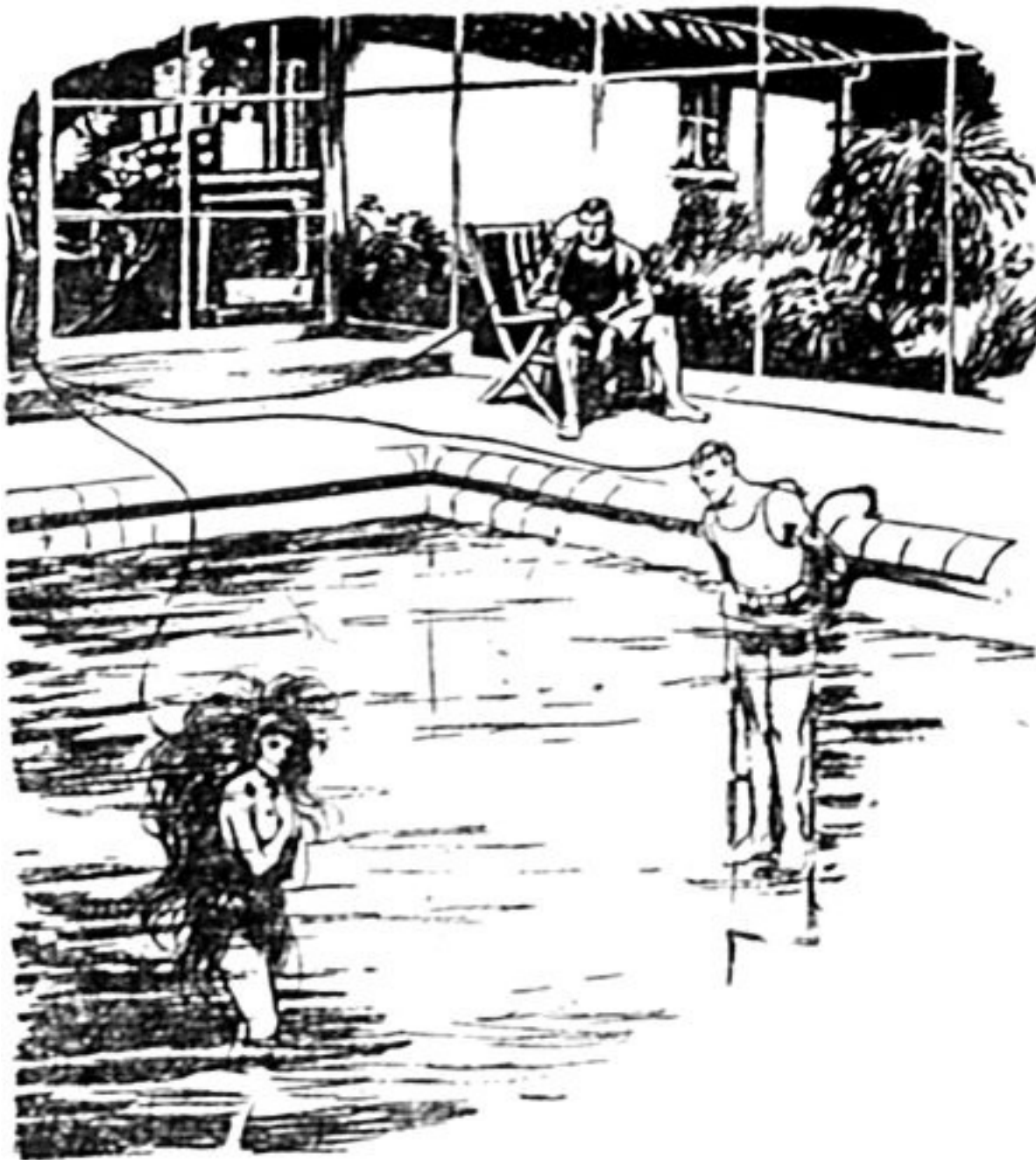
Bearing in mind what Mercer had said, I descended the ladder but a few rungs, so that my head remained out of water, and smiled down at the girl, touching the instrument on my head, and then pointing to hers.

I could sense Mercer’s thoughts now. He was picturing himself walking long the shore, with the stormy ocean in the background. Ahead of him I saw the white body lying face downward in the pool. I saw him run up to the pool and lift the slim, pale figure in his arms.

Let me make it clear, at this point, that when I say that I saw these things, I mean only that mental images of them penetrated my consciousness. I visualized them just as I could close my eyes and visualize, for example, the fireplace in the living room of my own home.

I looked down at the girl. She was frowning, and her eyes were very wide. Her head was a little on one

side, in the attitude of one who listens intently.



[Image description start: A black and white illustration showing Mercer's large swimming pool, with a view from the far side. Taylor stands up to his waist in the water on the ladder, Mercer sits on a

chair further back on the concrete, and the mermaid stands in the bottom of the pool, her hair dark around her, tilting her head slightly to the side. Each of them is wearing a headset with a long wire leading to a machine coming from an open window behind Mercer.

End image description.]

Slowly and carefully Mercer thought out the whole story of his experiences with the girl until she had plunged into the pool. Then I saw again the beach, with the girl's figure in the pool. The picture grew hazy; I realized Mercer was trying to picture the bottom of the sea. Then he pictured again the girl lying in the pool, and once again the sea. I was aware of the soft little tick in the center of my brain that announced that the switch had been moved to another contact point.

I glanced down at her. She was staring up at me with her great, curious eyes, and I sensed, through the medium of the instrument I wore, that she was thinking of me. I saw my own features, idealized, glowing with a strange beauty that was certainly none of my own. I realized that I saw myself, in short, as

she saw me. I smiled back at her, and shook my head.

A strange, dim whirl of pictures swept through my consciousness. I was on the bottom of the ocean. Shadowy shapes swept by silently, and from above, a dim bluish light filtered down on a scene such as mortal eyes have never seen.

All around were strange structures of jagged coral, roughly circular as to base, and rounded on top, resembling very much the igloos of the Eskimos. The structures varied greatly in size, and seemed to be arranged in some sort of regular order, like houses along a narrow street. Around many of them grew clusters of strange and colorful seaweeds that waved their banners gently, as though some imperceptible current dallied with them in passing.

Here and there figures moved, slim white figures that strolled along the narrow street, or at times shot overhead like veritable torpedoes.

There were both men and women moving there. The men were broader of shoulder, and their hair, which

they wore to their knees, was somewhat darker in color than that of the women. Both sexes were slim, and there was a remarkable uniformity of size and appearance.

None of the strange beings wore garments of any kind, nor were they necessary. The clinging tresses were cinctured at the waist with a sort of cord of twisted orange-colored material, and some of the younger women wore bands of the same material around their brows.

Nearest of all the figures was the girl who was visualizing all this for us. She was walking slowly away from the cluster of coral structures. Once or twice she paused, and seemed to hold conversation with others of the strange people, but each time she moved on.

The coral structures grew smaller and poorer. Finally the girl trod alone on the floor of the ocean, between great growths of kelp and seaweeds, with dim, looming masses of faintly tinted coral everywhere. Once she passed close to a tilted, ragged hulk of some

ancient vessel, its naked ribs packed with drifted sand.

Sauntering dreamily, she moved away from the ancient derelict. Suddenly a dim shadow swept across the sand at her feet, and she arrowed from the spot like a white, slim meteor. But behind her darted a black and swifter shadow--a shark!

Like a flash she turned and faced the monster. Something she had drawn from her girdle shone palely in her hand. It was a knife of whetted stone or bone.

Darting swiftly downward her feet spurned the yellow sand, and she shot at her enemy with amazing speed. The long blade swept in an arc, ripped the pale belly of the monster just as he turned to dart away.

A great cloud of blood dyed the water. The white figure of the girl shot onward through the scarlet flood.

Blinded, she did not see that the jutting ribs of the

ancient ship were in her path. I seemed to see her crash, head on, into one of the massive timbers, and I cried out involuntarily, and glanced down at the girl in the water at my feet.

Her eyes were glowing. She knew that I had understood.

Hazily, then, I seemed to visualize her body floating limply in the water. It was all very vague and indistinct, and I understood that this was not what she had seen, but what she thought had happened. The impressions grew wilder, swirled, grew gray and indistinct. Then I had a view of Mercer's face, so terribly distorted it was barely recognizable. Then a kaleidoscopic maze of inchoate scenes, shot through with flashes of vivid, agonizing colors. The girl was thinking of her suffering, taken out of her native element. In trying to save her, Mercer had almost killed her. That, no doubt, was why she hated him.

My own face appeared next, almost godlike in its kindliness and its imagined beauty, and I noticed now that she was thinking of me with my yellow hair

grown long, my nostrils elongated like her own--
adjusted to her own ideas of what a man should be.

I flung the instrument from my head and dropped to
the bottom of the pool. I gripped both her shoulders,
gently, to express my thanks and friendship.

My heart was pounding. There was a strange
fascination about this girl from the depths of the sea,
a subtle appeal that was answered from some deep
subterranean cavern of my being. I forgot, for the
moment, who and what I was. I remembered only that
a note had been sounded that awoke an echo of a
long-forgotten instinct.

I think I kissed her. I know her arms were about me,
and that I pressed her close, so that our faces almost
met. Her great, weirdly blue eyes seemed to bore into
my brain. I could feel them throbbing there....

I forgot time and space. I saw only that pale, smiling
face and those great dark eyes. Then, strangling, I
tore myself from her embrace and shot to the surface.

Coughing, I cleared my lungs of the water I had inhaled. I was weak and shaking when I finished, but my head was clear. The grip of the strange fantasy that had gripped me was shaken off.

Mercer was bending over me; speaking softly.

“I was watching, old man,” he said gently. “I can imagine what happened. A momentary, psychic fusing of an ancient, long since broken link. You, together with all mankind, came up out of the sea. But there is no retracing the way.”

I nodded, my head bowed on my streaming chest.

“Sorry, Mercer,” I muttered. “Something got into me. Those big eyes of hers seemed to tug at threads of memory ... buried.... I can’t describe it....”

He slapped me on my naked shoulder, a blow that stung, as he had intended it to. It helped jerk me back to the normal.

“You’ve got your feet on the ground again, Taylor,” he

commented soothingly. "I think there's no danger of you losing your grip on terra firma again. Shall we carry on?"

"There's more you'd like to learn? That you think she can give us?" I asked hesitantly.

"I believe," replied Mercer, "that she can give us the history of her people, if we can only make her understand what we wish. God! If we only could!" The name of the Deity was a prayer as Mercer uttered it.

"We can try, old-timer," I said, a bit shakenly.

Mercer hurried back to the other side of the pool, and I adjusted my head-set again, smiling down at the girl. If only Mercer could make her understand, and if only she knew what we wanted to learn!

I was conscious of the little click that told me the switch had been moved. Mercer was ready to get his message to her.

Fixing my eyes on the girl pleadingly, I settled myself

by the edge of the pool to await the second and more momentous part of our experiment.

The vision was vague, for Mercer was picturing his thoughts with difficulty. But I seemed to see again the floor of the ocean, with the vague light filtering down from above, and soft, monstrous growths waving their branches lazily in the flood.

From the left came a band of men and women, looking around as though in search of some particular spot. They stopped, and one of the older men pointed, the others gathering around him as though in council.

Then the band set to work. Coral growth were dragged to the spot. The foundation for one of the semi-circular houses was laid. The scene swirled and cleared again. The house was completed. Several other houses were in process of building.

Slowly and deliberately, the scene moved. The houses were left behind. Before my consciousness now was only a vague and shadowy expanse of ocean floor, and in the sand dim imprints that marked where the

strange people had trod, the vague footprints disappearing in the gloom in the direction from which the little weary band had come. To me, at least, it was quite clear that Mercer was asking whence they came. Would it be as clear to the girl? The switch clicked, and for a moment I was sure Mercer had not been able to make his question clear to her.

The scene was the interior of one of the coral houses. There were persons there, seated on stone or coral chairs, padded with marine growths. One of the occupants of the room was a very old man; his face was wrinkled, and his hair was silvery. With him were a man and a woman, and a little girl. Somehow I seemed to recognize the child as the girl in the pool.

The three of them were watching the old man. While his lips did not move, I could see his throat muscles twitching as the girl's had done when she made the murmuring sound I had guessed was her form of speech.

The scene faded. For perhaps thirty seconds I was aware of nothing more than a dim gray mist that

seemed to swirl in stately circles. Then, gradually, it cleared somewhat. I sensed the fact that what I saw now was what the old man was telling, and that the majestic, swirling mist was the turning back of time.

Here was no ocean bottom, but land, rich tropical jungle. Strange exotic trees and dense growths of rank undergrowth choked the earth. The trees were oddly like undersea growths, which puzzled me for an instant. Then I recalled that the girl could interpret the old man's words only in terms of that which she had seen and understood. This was the way she visualized the scene.

There was a gray haze of mist everywhere. The leaves were glistening with condensed moisture; swift drops fell incessantly to the soaking ground below.

Into the scene roamed a pitiful band of people. Men with massive frames, sunken in with starvation, women tottering with weakness. The men carried great clubs, some tipped with rudely shaped stone heads, and both men and women clothed only in short kittles of skin.

They searched ceaselessly for something, and I guessed that something was food. Now and then one or the other of the little band tore up a root and bit at it, and those that did so soon doubled into a twitching knot of suffering and dropped behind.

At last they came to the edge of the sea. A few yards away the water was lost in the dense steaming miasma that hemmed them in on all sides. With glad expressions on their faces, the party ran down to the edge of the water and gathered up great masses of clams and crabs. At first they ate the food raw, tearing the flesh from the shells. Then they made what I understood was a fire, although the girl was able to visualize it only as a bright red spot that flickered.

The scene faded, and there was only the slowly swirling mist that I understood indicated the passing of centuries. Then the scene cleared again.

I saw that same shore line, but the people had vanished. There was only the thick, steamy mist, the tropic jungle crowding down to the shore, and the

waves rolling in monotonously from the waste of gray ocean beyond the curtain of fog.

Suddenly, from out of the sea, appeared a series of human heads, and then a band of men and women that waded ashore and seated themselves upon the beach, gazing restlessly out across the sea.

This was not the same band I had seen at first. These were a slimmer race, and whereas the first band had been exceedingly swarthy, these were very fair.

They did not stay long on shore, for they were restless and ill at ease. It seemed to me they came there only from force of habit, as though they obeyed some inner urge they did not understand. In a few seconds they rose and ran into the water, plunged into it as though they welcomed its embrace, and disappeared. Then again the vision was swallowed up by the swirling mists of time.

When the scene cleared again, it showed the bottom of the sea. A group of perhaps a hundred pale creatures moved along the dim floor of the ocean.

Ahead I could see the dim outlines of one of their strange cities. The band approached, seemed to talk with those there, and moved on.

I saw them capture and kill fish for food, saw them carve the thick, spongy hearts from certain giant growths and eat them. I saw a pair of killer sharks swoop down on the band, and the quick, deadly accuracy with which both men and woman met the attack. One man, older than the rest, was injured before the sharks were vanquished, and when their efforts to staunch his wounds proved unavailing, they left him there and moved on. And as they left I saw a dim, crawling shape move closer, throw out a long, whiplike tentacle, and wrap the body in a hungry embrace.

They came to and passed other communities of beings like themselves, and a city of their own, in much the way that Mercer had visualized it.

Fading, the scene changed to the interior of the coral house again. The old man finished his story, and moved off into a cubicle in the rear of the place.

Dimly, I could see there a low couch, piled high with soft marine growths. Then the scene shifted once more.

A man and a woman hurried up and down the narrow streets of the strange city the girl had pictured when she showed us how she had met with the shark, and struck her head, so that for a long period she lost consciousness and was washed ashore.

Others, after a time, joined them in their search, which spread out to the floor of the ocean, away from the dwellings. One party came to the gaunt skeleton of the ancient wreck, and found the scattered, fresh-picked bones of the shark the girl had killed. The man and the woman came up, and I looked closely into their faces. The woman's features were torn with grief; the man's lips were set tight with suffering. Here, it was easy to guess, were the mother and the father of the girl.

A milling mass of white forms shot through the water in every direction, searching. It seemed that they were about to give up the search when suddenly, from

out of the watery gloom, there shot a slim white figure--the girl!

Straight to the mother and father she came, gripping the shoulder of each with frantic joy. They returned the caress, the crowd gathered around them, listening to her story as they moved slowly, happily, towards the distant city.

Instead of a picture, I was conscious then of a sound, like a single pleading word repeated softly, as though someone said "Please! Please! Please!" over and over again. The sound was not at all like the English word. It was a soft, musical beat, like the distant stroke of a mellow gong, but it had all the pleading quality of the word it seemed to bring to mind.

I looked down into the pool. The girl had mounted the ladder until her face was just below the surface of the water. Her eyes met mine and I knew that I had not misunderstood.

I threw off the instrument on my head, and dropped down beside her. With both hands I grasped her

shoulders, and, smiling, I nodded my head vigorously.

She understood, I know she did. I read it in her face. When I climbed the ladder again, she looked after me, smiling confidently.

Although I had not spoken to her, she had read and accepted the promise.

Mercer stared at me silently, grimly, as I told him what I wished. Whatever eloquence I may have, I used on him, and I saw his cold, scientific mind waver before the warmth of my appeal.

“We have no right to keep her from her people,” I concluded. “You saw her mother and father, saw their suffering, and the joy her return would bring. You will, Mercer--you will return her to the sea?”

For a long time, Mercer did not reply. Then he lifted his dark eyes to mine, and smiled, rather wearily.

“It is the only thing we can do, Taylor,” he said quietly. “She is not a scientific specimen; she is, in her

way, as human as you or I. She would probably die, away from her own kind, living under conditions foreign to her. And you promised her, Taylor, whether you spoke your promise or not.” His smile deepened a bit. “We cannot let her receive too bad an opinion of her cousins who live above the surface of the sea!”

And so, just as the dawn was breaking, we took her to the shore. I carried her, unresisting, trustful, in my arms, while Mercer bore a huge basin of water, in which her head was submerged, so that she might not suffer.

Still in our bathing suits we waded out into the ocean, until the waves splashed against our faces. Then I lowered her into the sea. Crouching there, so that the water was just above the tawny glory of her hair, she gazed up at us. Two slim white hands reached towards us, and with one accord, Mercer and I bent towards her. She gripped both our shoulders with a gentle pressure, smiling at us.

Then she did a strange thing. She pointed, under the water, out towards the depths and with a broad,

sweeping motion of her arm, indicated the shore, as though to say that she intended to return. With a last swift, smiling glance up into my face, she turned. There was a flash of white through the water. She was gone....

Silently, through the silence and beauty of the dawn, we made our way back to the house.

As we passed through the laboratory, Mercer glanced out at the empty pool.

“Man came up from the sea,” he said slowly, “and some men went back to it. They were forced back to the teeming source from whence they came, for lack of food. You saw that, Taylor--saw her forebears become amphibians, like the now extinct *Dipneusta* and *Ganoideii*, or the still existing *Neoceratodus*, *Polypterus* and *Amia*. Then their lungs became, in effect, gills, and they lost their power of breathing atmospheric air, and could use only air dissolved in water.

“A whole people there beneath the waves that land-

man never dreamed of--except, perhaps, the sailors of olden days, with their tales of mermaids, which we are accustomed to laugh at in our wisdom!"

"But why were no bodies ever washed ashore?" I asked. "I would think--"

"You saw why," interrupted Mercer grimly. "The ocean teems with hungry life. Death is the signal for a feast. It was little more than a miracle that her body came ashore, a miracle due perhaps to the storm which sent the hungry monsters to the greater depths. And even had a body come ashore it would have been buried as that of some unknown, unfortunate human. The differences between these people and ourselves would not be noticeable to a casual observer.

"No, Taylor, we have been party to what was close to a miracle. And we are the only witnesses to it, you and Carson and myself. And"--he sighed deeply--"it is over."

I did not reply. I was thinking of the girl's odd

gesture, at parting, and I wondered if it were indeed a finished chapter.

Into the Ocean's Depths

I read the telegram for the second time. Then I folded it up, put it in my pocket, and pressed the little button on my desk. My mind was made up.

To save Imee's race of Men-Who-Returned-To-The-Sea, two Land-Men answer the challenge of the dreaded Rorn, corsairs of the under-seas.

"Miss Fentress, I'm leaving this afternoon on an extended trip. The Florida address will reach me after Thursday. Tell Wade and Bennett to carry on. I think you have everything in hand? Is everything clear to you?"

"Yes, Mr. Taylor." Miss Fentress was not in the least surprised. She was used to my sudden trips. The outfit got along perfectly without me; sometimes I think my frequent absences are good for the business. The boys work like the devil to make a fine showing while I'm away. And Miss Fentress is a perfect gem of a secretary. I had nothing to worry about there.

"Fine! Will you get my diggings on the phone?" I hurriedly put my few papers in place, and signed a couple of letters. Then Josef was on the wire.

"Josef? Pack my bags right away, will you? For Florida. The usual things.... Yes, right away. I'll be leaving by noon.... Yes, driving through."

That was that. There were a few more letters to sign, a few hasty instructions to be given regarding one or two matters that were hanging fire. Then, on my way to my bachelor apartments, I read the telegram through again:

THINK IT WORTH WHILE IF YOU FEEL
ADVENTUROUS AND HAVE NOTHING PRESSING
TO COME TO THE MONSTROSITY STOP MAKE
YOUR WILL FIRST STOP SHALL LOOK FOR YOU
ANY DAY AS I KNOW YOU ARE ALWAYS LOOKING
FOR EXCITEMENT AND NEVER HAVE ANYTHING
IMPORTANT TO DO SO DON'T BOTHER TO WIRE
STOP PERHAPS WE SHALL SEE HER AGAIN

MERCER

[Plain text: Think it worth while if you feel adventurous and have nothing pressing to come to The Monstrosity. Make your will first. Shall look for you any day as I know you are always looking for excitement and never have anything important to do so don't bother to wire. Perhaps we shall see her again -Mercer. End plain text.]

I smiled at Mercer's frank opinion of my disposition and my importance to my business. But I frowned over the admonition to make my will, and the last telling statement in the wire: "Perhaps we shall see her again." I knew whom he meant by "her."

Josef had my bags waiting for me. A few hurried instructions, most of them shouted over my shoulder, and I was purring down the main drag, my duffel in the rumble, and the roadster headed due south.

"Perhaps we shall see her again." Those words from the telegram kept coming before my eyes. Mercer knew what he was about, if he wanted my company, when he put that line in his wire.

I have already told the story of our first meeting with the strange being from the ocean's depths that, wounded and senseless, had been flung up on the beach near Warren Mercer's Florida estate. In all the history of civilization, no stranger bit of flotsam had ever been cast up by a storm.

Neither of us would ever forget that slim white creature, swathed in her veil of long, light golden hair, as she crouched on the bottom of Mercer's swimming pool, and pictured for us, by means of Mercer's thought-telegraph (my own name for the device; he has a long and scientific title for it with as many joints as a centipede), the story of her people.

They had lived in a country of steaming mist, when the world was very young. They had been forced into the sea to obtain food, and after many generations they had gone back to the sea as man once emerged from it. They had grown webs on their hands and feet, and they breathed oxygen dissolved in water, as fishes do, instead of taking it from the atmosphere. And under the mighty Atlantic, somewhere, were their villages.

The girl had pictured all these things for us, and then—nearly a year ago, now—she had pleaded with us to let her return to her people. And so we had put her back into the sea, and she had bade us farewell. But just before she disappeared, she had done a strange thing.

She had pointed, under the water, out towards the depth, and then, with a broad, sweeping motion of her arm, she had indicated the shore, as though to promise, it seemed to me, that she intended to return.

And now, Mercer said, we might see her again! How? Mercer, conservative and scientific, was not the man to make rash promises. But how...?

The best way to solve the riddle was to reach Mercer, and I broke the speed laws of five states three days running.

I did not even stop at my own little shack. It was only four miles from there to the huge, rather neglected estate, built in boom times by some newly-rich promoter, and dubbed by Mercer "The Monstrosity."

Hardly bothering to slow down, I turned off the concrete onto the long, weed-grown gravel drive, and shot between the two massive, stuccoed pillars that guarded the drive. Their corroded bronze plates, bearing the original title of the estate, "The Billows," were a promise that my long, hard drive was nearly at an end.

As soon as the huge, rambling structure was fairly in sight, I pressed the flat of my hand on the horn button. By the time I came to a locked-wheel halt, with the gravel rattling on my fenders, Mercer was there to greet me.

"It's ten o'clock," he grinned as he shook hands. "I'd set noon as the hour of your arrival. You certainly must have made time, Taylor!"

"I did!" I nodded rather grimly, recalling one or two narrow squeaks. "But who wouldn't, with a wire like this?" I produced the crumpled telegram rather dramatically. "You've got a lot to explain."

"I know it." Mercer was quite serious now. "Come on

in and we'll mix highballs with the story."

Locked arm in arm, we entered the house together, and settled ourselves in the huge living room.

Mercer, I could see at a glance, was thinner and browner than when we had parted, but otherwise, he was the same lithe, soft-mannered little scientist I had known for years; dark-eyed, with an almost beautiful mouth, outlined by a slim, closely cropped and very black moustache.

"Well, here's to our lady from the sea," proposed Mercer, when Carson, his man, had brought the drinks and departed. I nodded, and we both sipped our highballs.

"Briefly," said my friend, "this is the story. You and I know that somewhere beneath the Atlantic there are a people who went back to whence they came. We have seen one of those people. I propose that, since they cannot come to us, we go to them. I have made preparations to go to them, and I wanted you to have the opportunity of going with me, if you wish."

"But how, Mercer? And what—"

He interrupted with a quick, nervous gesture.

"I'll show you, presently. I believe it can be done. It will be a dangerous adventure, though; I was not joking when I advised you to make your will. An uncertain venture, too. But, I believe, most wonderfully worth while." His eyes were shining now with all the enthusiasm of the scientist, the dreamer.

"It sounds mighty appealing," I said. "But how...."

"Finish your drink and I'll show you."

I downed what was left of my highball in two mighty gulps.

"Lead me to it, Mercer!"

He smiled his quiet smile and led the way to what had been the billiard room of "The Billows," but which was the laboratory of "The Monstrosity." The first thing my eyes fell upon were two gleaming metal objects

suspended from chains let into the ceiling.

"Diving suits," explained Mercer. "Rather different from anything you've ever seen."

They were different. The body was a perfect globe, as was the head-piece. The legs were cylindrical, jointed at knee and thigh with huge discs. The feet were solid metal, curved rocker-like on the bottom, and at the ends of the arms were three hooked talons, the concave sides of two talons facing the concave side of the third. The arms were hinged at the elbow just as the legs were hinged, but there was a huge ball-and-socket joint at the shoulder.

"But Mercer!" I protested. "No human being could even stand up with that weight of metal on and around him!"

"You're mistaken, Taylor," smiled Mercer. "That is not solid metal, you see. And it is an aluminum alloy that is not nearly as heavy as it looks. There are two walls, slightly over an inch apart, braced by innumerable trusses. The fabric is nearly as strong as that much

solid metal, and infinitely lighter. They work all right, Taylor. I know, because I've tried them."

"And this hump on the back?" I asked, walking around the odd, dangling figures, hanging like bloated metal skeletons from their chains. I had thought the bodies were perfect globes; I could see now that at the rear there was a humplike excrescence across the shoulders.

"Air," explained Mercer. "There are two other tanks inside the globular body. That shape was adopted, by the way, because a globe can withstand more pressure than any other shape. And we may have to go where pressures are high."

"And so," I said, "we don these things and stroll out into the Atlantic looking for the girl and her friends?"

"Hardly. They're not quite the apparel for so long a stroll. You haven't seen all the marvels yet. Come along!"

He led the way through the patio, beside the pool in

which our strange visitor from the depths had lived during her brief stay with us, and out into the open again. As we neared the sea, I became aware, for the first time, of a faint, muffled hammering sound, and I glanced at Mercer inquiringly.

"Just a second," he smiled. "Then—there she is, Taylor!"

I stood still and stared. In a little cove, cradled in a cunning, spidery structure of wood, a submarine rested upon the ways.

"Good Lord!" I exclaimed. "You're going into this right, Mercer!"

"Yes. Because I think it's immensely worth while. But come along and let me show you the *Santa Maria*—named after the flagship of Columbus' little fleet. Come on!"

Two men with army automatics strapped significantly to their belts nodded courteously as we came up. They were the only men in sight, but from the

hammering going on inside there must have been quite a sizeable crew busy in the interior. A couple of raw pine shacks, some little distance away, provided quarters for, I judged, twenty or thirty men.

"Had her shipped down in pieces," explained Mercer. "The boat that brought it lay to off shore and we lightered the parts ashore. A tremendous job. But she'll be ready for the water in a week; ten days at the latest."

"You're a wonder," I said, and I meant it.

Mercer patted the red-leaded side of the submarine affectionately. "Later," he said, "I'll take you inside, but they're busy as the devil in there, and the sound of the hammers fairly makes your head ring. You'll see it all later, anyway—if you feel you'd like to share the adventure with me?"

"Listen," I grinned as we turned back towards the house, "it'll take more than those two lads with the pop-guns to keep me out of the *Santa Maria* when she sails—or dives, or whatever it is she's supposed to

do!"

Mercer laughed softly, and we walked the rest of the way in silence. I imagine we were both pretty busy with our thoughts; I know that I was. And several times, as we walked along, I looked back over my shoulder towards the ungainly red monster straddling on her spindling wooden legs—and towards the smiling Atlantic, glistening serenely in the sun.

Mercer was so busy with a thousand and one details that I found myself very much in the way if I followed him around, so I decided to loaf.

For weeks after we had put our strange girl visitor back into the sea from whence Mercer had taken her, I had watched from a comfortable seat well above the high-water mark that commanded that section of shore. For I had felt sure by that last strange gesture of hers that she meant to return.

I located my old seat, and I found that it had been used a great deal since I had left it. There were whole winnows of cigarette butts, some of them quite fresh,

all around. Mercer, cold-blooded scientist as he was, had hoped against hope that she would return too.

It was a very comfortable seat, in the shade of a little cluster of palms, and for the next several days I spent most of my time there, reading and smoking—and watching. No matter how interesting the book, I found myself, every few seconds, lifting my eyes to search the beach and the sea.

I am not sure, but I think it was the eighth day after my arrival that I looked up and saw, for the first time, something besides the smiling beach and the ceaseless procession of incoming rollers. For an instant I doubted what I saw; then, with a cry that stuck in my throat, I dropped my book unheeded to the sand and raced towards the shore.

She was there! White and slim, her pale gold hair clinging to her body and gleaming like polished metal in the sun, she stood for a moment, while the spray frothed at her thighs. Behind her, crouching below the surface, I could distinguish two other forms. She had returned, and not alone!

One long, slim arm shot out toward me, held level with the shoulder: the well-remembered gesture of greeting. Then she too crouched below the surface that she might breathe.

As I ran out onto the wet sand, the waves splashing around my ankles all unheeded, she rose again, and now I could see her lovely smile, and her dark, glowing eyes. I was babbling—I do not know what. Before I could reach her, she smiled and sank again below the surface.

I waded on out, laughing excitedly, and as I came close to her, she bobbed up again out of the spray, and we greeted each other in the manner of her people, hands outstretched, each gripping the shoulder of the other.

She made a quick motion then, with both hands, as though she placed a cap upon the shining glory of her head, and I understood in an instant what she wished: the antenna of Mercer's thought-telegraph, by the aid of which she had told us the story of herself and her people.

I nodded and smiled, and pointed to the spot where she stood, trying to show her by my expression that I understood, and by my gesture, that she was to wait here for me. She smiled and nodded in return, and crouched again below the surface of the heaving sea.

As I turned toward the beach, I caught a momentary glimpse of the two who had come with her. They were a man and a woman, watching me with wide, half-curious, half-frightened eyes. I recognized them instantly from the picture she had impressed upon my mind nearly a year ago. She had brought with her on her journey her mother and her father.

Stumbling, my legs shaking with excitement, I ran through the water. With my wet trousers flapping against my ankles, I sprinted towards the house.

I found Mercer in the laboratory. He looked up as I came rushing in, wet from the shoulders down, and I saw his eyes grow suddenly wide.

I opened my mouth to speak, but I was breathless. And Mercer took the words from my mouth before I

could utter them.

"She's come back!" he cried. "She's come back! Taylor—she has?" He gripped me, his fingers like steel clamps, shaking me with his amazing strength.

"Yes." I found my breath and my voice at the same instant. "She's there, just where we put her into the sea, and there are two others with her—her mother and her father. Come on, Mercer, and bring your thought gadget!"

"I can't!" he groaned. "I've built an improvement on it into the diving armor, and a central instrument on the sub, but the old apparatus is strewn all over the table, here, just as it was when we used it the other time. We'll have to bring her here."

"Get a basin, then!" I said. "We'll carry her back to the pool just as we took her from it. Hurry!"

And we did just that. Mercer snatched up a huge glass basin used in his chemistry experiments, and we raced down to the shore. As well as we could we

explained our wishes, and she smiled her quick smile of understanding. Crouching beneath the water, she turned to her companions, and I could see her throat move as she spoke to them. They seemed to protest, dubious and frightened, but in the end she seemed to reassure them, and we picked her up, swathed in her hair as in a silken gown, and carried her, her head immersed in the basin of water, that she might breathe in comfort, to the pool.

It all took but a few minutes, but it seemed hours. Mercer's hands were shaking as he handed me the antenna for the girl and another for myself, and his teeth were chattering as he spoke.

"Hurry, Taylor!" he said. "I've set the switch so that she can do the sending, while we receive. Quickly, man!"

I leaped into the pool and adjusted the antenna on her head, making sure that the four electrodes of the crossed curved members pressed against the front and back and both sides of her head. Then, hastily, I climbed out of the pool, seated myself on its edge,

and put on my own antenna.

Perhaps I should say at this time that Mercer's device for conveying thought could do no more than convey what was in the mind of the person sending. Mercer and I could convey actual words and sentences, because we understood each other's language, and by thinking in words, we conveyed our thoughts in words. One received the impression, almost, of having heard actual speech.

We could not communicate with the girl in this fashion, however, for we did not understand her speech. She had to convey her thoughts to us by means of mental pictures which told her story. And this is the story of her pictures unfolded.

First, in sketchy, half-formed pictures, I saw her return to the village, of her people; her welcome there, with curious crowds around her, questioning her. Their incredulous expressions as she told them of her experience were ludicrous. Her meeting with her father and mother brought a little catch to my throat, and I looked across the pool at Mercer. I knew that

he, too, was glad that we had put her back into the sea when she wished to go.

These pictures faded hastily, and for a moment there was only the circular swirling as of gray mist; that was the symbol she adopted to denote the passing of time. Then, slowly, the picture cleared.

It was the same village I had seen before, with its ragged, warped, narrow streets, and its row of dome-shaped houses, for all the world like Eskimo igloos, but made of coral and various forms of vegetation. At the outskirts of the village I could see the gently moving, shadowy forms of weird submarine growths, and the quick darting shapes of innumerable fishes.

Some few people were moving along the streets, walking with oddly springy steps. Others, a larger number, darted here and there above the roofs, some hovering in the water as gulls hover in the air, lazily, but the majority apparently on business or work to be executed with dispatch.

Suddenly, into the midst of this peaceful scene, three

figures came darting. They were not like the people of the village, for they were smaller, and instead of being gracefully slim they were short and powerful in build. They were not white like the people of the girl's village, but swarthy, and they were dressed in a sort of tight-fitting shirt of gleaming leather—shark-skin, I learned later. They carried, tucked through a sort of belt made of twisted vegetation, two long, slim knives of pointed stone or bone.

But it was not until they seemed to come close to me that I saw the great point of difference. Their faces were scarcely human. The nose had become rudimentary, leaving a large, blank expanse in the middle of their faces that gave them a peculiarly hideous expression. Their eyes were almost perfectly round, and very fierce, and their mouths huge and fishlike. Beneath their sharp, jutting jaws, between the angle of the jaws and a spot beneath the ears, were huge, longitudinal slits, that intermittently showed blood-red, like fresh gashes cut in the sides of their throats. I could see even the hard, bony cover that protected these slits, and I realized that these

were gills! Here were representatives of a people that had gone back to the sea ages before the people of the girl's village.

Their coming caused a sort of panic in the village, and the three noseless creatures strode down the principal street grinning hugely, glancing from right to left, and showing their sharp pointed teeth. They looked more like sharks than like human beings.

A committee of five gray old men met the visitors, and conducted them into one of the larger houses. Insolently, the leader of the three shark-faced creatures made demands, and the scene changed swiftly to make clear the nature of those demands.

The village was to give a number of its finest young men and women to the shark-faced people; about fifty of each sex, I gathered, to be servants, slaves, to the noseless ones.

The scene shifted quickly to the interior of the house. The old men were shaking their heads, protesting, explaining. There was fear on their faces, but there

was determination, too.

One of the three envoys snarled and came closer to the five old men, lifting a knife threateningly. I thought for an instant that he was about to strike down one of the villagers; then the picture dissolved into another, and I saw that he was but threatening them with what he could cause to happen.

The fate of the village and the villagers, were the demands of the three refused, was a terrible one. Hordes of the noseless creatures came swarming. They tore the houses apart, and with their long, slim white weapons they killed the old men and women, and the children. The villagers fought desperately, but they were outnumbered. The shark-skin kirtles of the invaders turned their knives like armor, and the sea grew red with swirling blood that spread like scarlet smoke through the water. Then, this too faded, and I saw the old men cowering, pleading with the three terrible envoys.

The leader of the three shark-faced creatures spoke again. He would give them time—a short revolving

swirl of gray that indicated only a brief time, apparently—and return for an answer. Grinning evilly, the three turned away, left the dome-shaped house, and darted away over the roofs of the village into the dim darkness of the distant waters.

I saw the girl, then, talking to the elders. They smiled sadly, and shook their heads hopelessly. She argued with them earnestly, painting a picture for them: Mercer and myself, as she viewed us, tall and very strong and with great wisdom in our faces. We too walked along the streets of the village. The hordes of shark-faced ones came, like a swarm of monstrous sharks, and—the picture was very vague and nebulous, now—we put them to rout.

She wished us to help her, she had convinced the elders that we could. She, her mother and father, started out from the village. Three times they had fought with sharks, and each time they had killed them. They had found the shore, the very spot where we had put her back into the sea. Then there was a momentary flash of the picture she had called up, of Mercer and I putting the shark-faced hordes to rout,

and then, startlingly, I was conscious of that high, pleading sound—the sound that I had heard once before, when she had begged us to return her to her people.

The sound that I knew was her word for "*Please!*"

There was a little click. Mercer had turned the switch. He would transmit now; she and I would listen.

In the center of the village—how vaguely and clumsily he pictured it!—rested the *Santa Maria*. From a trap in the bottom two bulging, gleaming figures emerged. Rushing up, a glimpse through the face-plates revealed Mercer and myself. The shark-faced hordes descended, and Mercer waved something, something like a huge bottle, towards them. None of the villagers were in sight.

The noseless ones swooped down on us fearlessly, knives drawn, pointed teeth revealed in fiendish grins. But they did not reach us. By dozens, by scores, they went limp and floated slowly to the floor of the ocean. Their bodies covered the streets, they

sprawled across the roofs of the houses. And in a few seconds there was not one alive of all the hundreds who had come!

I looked down at the girl. She was smiling up at me through the clear water, and once again I felt the strange, strong tug at my heart-strings. Her great dark eyes glowed with a perfect confidence, a supreme faith.

We had made her a promise.

I wondered if it would be possible to keep it.

In the day following, the *Santa Maria* was launched. Two days later, trial trips and final adjustments completed, we submerged for the great adventure.

It sounds very simple when recorded thus in a few brief lines. It was not, however, such a simple matter. Those three days were full of hectic activity. Mercer and I did not sleep more than four hours any of those three nights.

We were too busy to talk. Mercer worked frantically in his laboratory, slaving feverishly beside the big hood. I overlooked the tests of the submarine and the loading of the necessary supplies.

The girl we had taken back to her parents, giving her to understand that she was to wait. They went away, but every few hours returned, as though to urge us to greater haste. And at last we were ready, and the girl and her two companions seated themselves on the tiny deck of the *Santa Maria*, just forward of the conning tower, holding themselves in place by the chains. We had already instructed the girl in her duties: we would move slowly, and she should guide us, by pointing either to the right or the left.

I will confess I gave a last long, lingering look at the shore before the hatch of the conning tower was clamped down. I was not exactly afraid, but I wondered if I would ever step foot on solid land again.

Standing in the conning tower beside Mercer, I watched the sea rise at an angle to meet us, and I dodged instinctively as the first green wave pelted

against the thick porthole through which I was looking. An instant later the water closed over the top of the conning tower, and at a gentle angle we nosed towards the bottom of the sea.

An account of the trip itself, perhaps, does not belong in this record. It was not a pleasant adventure in itself, for the *Santa Maria*, like every undersea craft, I suppose, was close, smelly, and cramped. We proceeded very slowly, for only by so doing could our guide keep her bearings, and how she found the way was a mystery to all of us. We could see but very little, despite the clearness of the water.

It was by no means a sight-seeing trip. For various reasons, Mercer had cut our crew to the minimum. We had two navigating officers, experienced submarine men both, and five sailors, also experienced in undersea work. With such a short crew, Mercer and I were both kept busy.

Bonnett, the captain, was a tall, dark chap, stooped from years in the low, cramped quarters of submarines. Duke, our second-officer, was a

youngster hardly out of his 'teens, and as clever as they come. And although both of them, and the crew as well, must have been agog with questions, neither by word nor look did they express their feelings. Mercer had paid for obedience without curiosity, and he got it.

We spent the first night on the bottom, for the simple reason that had we come to the surface, we might have come down into territory unfamiliar to our guide. As soon as the first faint light began to filter down, however, we proceeded, and Mercer and I crowded together into the conning tower.

"We're close," said Mercer. "See how excited they are, all three of them."

The three strange creatures were holding onto the chains and staring over the bulging side of the ship. Every few seconds the girl turned and looked back at us, smiling, her eyes shining with excitement. Suddenly she pointed straight down, and held out her arm in unmistakable gesture. We were to stop.

Mercer conveyed the order instantly to Bonnett at the controls, and all three of our guides dived gracefully off the ship and disappeared into the depths below.

"Let her settle to the bottom, Bonnett," ordered Mercer. "Slowly ... slowly...."

Bonnett handled the ship neatly, keeping her nicely trimmed. We came to rest on the bottom in four or five seconds, and as Mercer and I stared out eagerly through the round glass ports of the conning tower, we could see, very dimly, a cluster of dark, rounded projections cropping out from the bed of the ocean. We were only a few yards from the edge of the girl's village.

The scene was exactly as we had pictured it, save that it was not nearly as clear and well lighted. I realized that our eyes were not accustomed to the gloom, as were those of the girl and her people, but I could distinguish the vague outlines of the houses, and the slowly swaying shapes of monstrous growths.

"Well, Taylor," said Mercer, his voice shaking with

excitement, "here we are! And here"—peering out through the glass-covered port again—"are her people!"

The whole village was swarming around us. White bodies hovered around us as moths around a light. Faces pressed against the ports and stared in at us with great, amazed eyes.

Then, suddenly the crowd of curious creatures parted, and the girl came darting up with the five ancients she had showed us before. They were evidently the council responsible for the government of the village, or something of the sort, for the other villagers bowed their heads respectfully as they passed.

The girl came close to the port through which I was looking, and gestured earnestly. Her face was tense and anxious, and from time to time she glanced over her shoulder, as though she feared the coming of an enemy.

"Our time's short, I take it, if we are to be of service," said Mercer. "Come on, Taylor; into the diving suits!"

I signaled the girl that we understood, and would hurry. Then I followed Mercer into our tiny stateroom.

"Remember what I've told you," he said, as we slipped into the heavy woolen undergarments we were to wear inside the suits. "You understand how to handle your air, I believe, and you'll have no difficulty getting around in the suit if you'll just remember to go slowly. Your job is to get the whole village to get away when the enemy is sighted. Get them to come this way from the village, towards the ship, understand. The current comes from this direction; the way the vegetation bends shows that. And keep the girl's people away until I signal you to let them return. And remember to take your electric lantern. Don't burn it more than is necessary; the batteries are not large and the bulb draws a lot of current. Ready?"

I was, but I was shaking a little as the men helped me into the mighty armor that was to keep the pressure of several atmospheres from crushing my body. The helmet was the last piece to be donned; when it was screwed in place I stood there like a mummy, almost completely rigid.

Quickly we were put into the air lock, together with a large iron box containing a number of things Mercer needed. Darkness and water rushed in on us. The water closed over my head. I became aware of the soft, continuous popping sounds of the air-bubbles escaping from the relief valve of the head-piece.

For a moment I was dizzy and more than a little nauseated. I could feel the cold sweat pricking my forehead. Then there was a sudden glow of light from before me, and I started walking towards it. I found I could walk now; not easily, but, after I caught the trick of it, without much difficulty. I could move my arms, too, and the interlocking hooks that served me for fingers. When my real fingers closed upon a little cross-bar at the end of the armored arms, and pulled the bars towards me, the steel claws outside came together, like a thumb and two fingers.

In a moment we stood upon the bottom of the ocean. I turned my head inside the helmet, and there, beside me, was the sleek, smooth side of the *Santa Maria*. On my other side was Mercer, a huge, dim figure in his diving armor. He made an awkward gesture towards

his head, and I suddenly remembered something.

Before me, where I could operate it with a thrusting movement of my chin, was a toggle switch. I snapped it over, and heard Mercer's voice: "—n't forget everything I tell him."

"I know it," I said mentally to him. "I was rather rattled. O.K. now, however. Anything I can do?"

"Yes. Help me with this box, and then get the girl to put on the antenna you'll find there. Don't forget the knife and the light."

"Right!" I bent over the box with him, and we both came near falling. We opened the lid, however, and I hooked the knife and the light into their proper places outside my armor. Then, with the antenna for the girl, so that we could establish connections with her, and through her, with the villagers, I moved off.

This antenna was entirely different from the one used in previous experiments. The four cross-members that clasped the head were finer, and at their junction was

a flat black circular box, from which rose a black rod some six inches in height, and topped by a black sphere half the size of my fist.

These perfected thought-telegraphs (I shall continue to use my own designation for them, as clearer and more understandable than Mercer's) did not need connecting wires; they conveyed their impulses by Hertzian waves to a master receiver on the *Santa Maria*, which amplified them and re-broadcast them so that each of us could both send and receive at any time.

As I turned, I found the girl beside me, waiting anxiously. Behind her were the five ancients. I slipped the antenna over her head, and instantly she began telling me that danger was imminent.

To facilitate matters, I shall describe her messages as though she spoke; indeed, her pictures were as clear, almost, as speech in my native tongue. And at times she did use certain sound-words; it was in this way that I learned, by inference, that her name was *Imee*, that her people were called *Teemorn* (this may have

been the name of the community, or perhaps it was interchangeable—I am not sure) and that the shark-faced people were the *Rorn*.

"The Rorn come!" she said quickly. "Two days past, the three came again, and our old men refused to give up the slaves. Today they will return, these Rorn, and my people, the Teemorn will all be made dead!"

Then I told her what Mercer had said: that she and every one of her people must flee swiftly and hide, beyond the boat, a distance beyond the village. Mercer and I would wait here, and when the Rorn came, it was they who would be made dead, as we had promised. Although how, I admitted to myself, being careful to hide the thought that she might not sense it, I didn't know. We had been too busy since the girl's arrival to go into details.

She turned and spoke quickly to the old men. They looked at me doubtfully, and she urged them vehemently. They turned back towards the village, and in a moment the Teemorn were stalking by obediently, losing their slim white forms in the gloom

behind the dim bulk of the *Santa Maria*, resting so quietly on the sand.

They were hardly out of sight when suddenly Mercer spoke through the antenna fitted inside my helmet.

"They're coming!" he cried. "Look above and to your right! The Rorn, as Imee calls them, have arrived!"

I looked up and beheld a hundred—no, a thousand!—shadowy forms darting down on the village, upon us. They, too, were just as the girl had pictured them: short, swart beings with but the suggestion of a nose, and with pulsing gill-covers under the angles of their jaws. Each one gripped a long, slim white knife in either hand, and their tight-fitting shark-skin armor gleamed darkly as they swooped down upon us.

Eagerly I watched my friend. In the clasping talons of his left hand he held a long, slim flask that glinted even in that dim, confusing twilight. Two others, mates to the first, dangled at his waist. Lifting it high above his head, he swung his metal-clad right arm, and shattered the flask he held in his taloned left

hand.

For an instant nothing happened, save that flittering bits of broken glass shimmered their way to the sand. Then the horde of noseless ones seemed to dissolve, as hundreds of limp and sprawling bodies sank to the sand. Perhaps a half of that great multitude seemed struck dead.

"Hydrocyanic acid, Taylor!" cried Mercer exultantly. "Even diluted by the sea water, it kills almost instantly. Go back and make sure that none of the girl's people come back before the current has washed this away, or they'll go in the same fashion. Warn her to keep them back!"

I hurried toward the *Santa Maria*, thinking urgent warnings for Imee's benefit. "Stay back! Stay back, Imee! The Rorn are falling to the sand, we have made many of them dead, but the danger for you and your people is still here. Stay back!"

"Truly, do the Rorn become dead? I would like to see that with my own eyes. Be careful that they do not

make you dead also, and your friend, for they have large brains, these Rorn."

"Do not come to see with your own eyes, or you will be as the Rorn!" I hurried around the submarine, to keep her back by force, if that were necessary. "You must—"

"Help, Taylor!" cut in a voice—Mercer's. "These devils have got me!"

"Right with you!" I turned and hurried back as swiftly as I could, stumbling over the bodies of dead Rorn that had settled everywhere on the clean yellow sand.

I found Mercer in the grip of six of the shark-faced creatures. They were trying desperately to stab him, but their knives bent and broke against the metal of his armor. So busy were they with him that they did not notice me coming up, but finding their weapons useless, they suddenly snatched him up, one at either arm and either leg, and two grasping him by the head-piece, and darted away with him, carrying his bulging metal body between them like a battering

ram, while he kicked and struggled impotently.

"They are taking him to the Place of Darkness!" cried Imee suddenly, having read my impressions of the scene. "Oh, go quickly, quickly, toward the direction of your best hand—to your right! I shall follow!"

"No! No! Stay back!" I warned her frantically. All but these six Rorn had fallen victims of Mercer's hellish poison, and while they seemed to be suffering no ill effects, I thought it more than likely that some sly current might bring the deadly poison to the girl, did she come this way, and kill her as surely as it had killed these hundreds of Rorn.

To the right, she had said. Towards the Place of Darkness. I hurried out of the village in the direction she indicated, towards the distant gleam of Mercer's armor, rapidly being lost in the gloom.

"I'm coming, Mercer!" I called to him. "Delay them as much as you can. You're going faster than I can."

"I can't help myself much," replied Mercer. "Doing

what I can. Strong—they're devilish strong, Taylor. And, at close range, I can see you were right. They have true gill-covers; their noses are rudimentary and —"

"The devil take your scientific observations! Drag! Slow them down. I'm losing sight of you. For heaven's sake, drag!"

"I'm doing what I can. Damn you, if I could only get a hand free—" I realized that this last was directed at his captors, and plunged on.

Huge, monstrous growths swirled around me like living things. My feet crunched on shelled things, and sank into soft and slimy creeping things on the bottom. I cursed the water that held me back so gently yet so firmly; I cursed the armor that made it so hard for me to move my legs. But I kept on, and at last I began to gain on them; I could see them quite distinctly, bending over Mercer, working on him....

"Do your best, Taylor," urged Mercer desperately.

"We're on the edge of a sort of cliff; a fault in the

structure of the ocean bed. They're tying me with strong cords of leather. Tying a huge stone to my body. I think they—" I had a momentary flash of the scene as Mercer saw it at that instant: the horrid noseless face close to his, the swart bodies moving with amazing agility. And at his very feet, a yawning precipice, holding nothing but darkness, leading down and down into nothingness.

"Run quickly!" It was Imee. She, too, had seen what I had seen. "That is the Place of Darkness, where we take those whom the Five deem worthy of the Last Punishment. They will tie the stone to him, and bear him out above the Blackness, and then they will let him go! Quickly! Quickly!"

I was almost upon them now, and one of the six turned and saw me. Three of them darted towards me, while the others held Mercer flat upon the edge of the precipice. If they had only realized that by rolling his armored body a foot or two, he would sink ... without the stone.... But they did not. Their brains had little reasoning power, apparently. The attaching of a stone was necessary, in their

experience; it was necessary now.

With my left hand I unhooked my light; I already gripped my knife in my right hand. Swinging the light sharply against my leg, I struck the toggle-switch, and a beam of intense brilliancy shot through the gloom. It aided me, as I had thought it would; it blinded these large-eyed denizens of the deep.

Swiftly I struck out with the knife. It hacked harmlessly into the shark-skin garment of one of the men, and I stabbed out again. Two of the men leaped for my right arm, but the knife found, this time, the throat of the third. My beam of light showed palely red, for a moment, and the body of the Rorn toppled slowly to the bed of the ocean.

The two shark-faced creatures were hammering at me with their fists, dragging at my arms and legs, but I plunged on desperately towards Mercer. Myriads of fish, all shapes and colors and sizes, attracted by the light, swarmed around us.

"Good boy!" Mercer commended. "See if you can

break this last flask of acid, here at my waist. See—"

With a last desperate plunge, fairly dragging the two Rorn who tugged at me, I fell forward. With the clenched steel talons of my right hand, I struck at the silvery flask I could see dangling from Mercer's waist. I hit it, but only a glancing blow; the flask did not shatter.

"Again!" commanded Mercer. "It's heavy annealed glass—hydrocyanic acid—terrible stuff—even the fumes—"

I paid but slight heed. The two Rorn dragged me back, but I managed to crawl forward on my knees, and with all my strength, I struck at the flask again.

This time it shattered, and I lay where I fell, sobbing with weakness, looking out through the side window of my head-piece.

The five Rorn seemed to suddenly lose their strength. They struggled limply for a moment, and then floated down to the waiting sand beneath us.

"Finish," remarked Mercer coolly. "And just in time. Let's see if we can find our way back to the *Santa Maria*."

We were weary, and we plodded along slowly, twin trails of air-bubbles like plumes waving behind us, rushing upwards to the surface. I felt strangely alone at the moment, isolated, cut off from all mankind, on the bottom of the Atlantic.

"Coming to meet you, all of us," Imee signaled us. "Be careful where you step, so that you do not walk in a circle and find again the Place of Darkness. It is very large."

"Probably some uncharted deep," threw in Mercer. "Only the larger ones have been located."

For my part, I was too weary to think. I just staggered on.

A crowd of slim, darting white shapes surrounded us. They swam before us, showing the way. The five patriarchs walked majestically before us; and

between us, smiling at us through the thick lenses of our headpieces, walked Imee. Oh, it was a triumphal procession, and had I been less weary, I presume I would have felt quite the hero.

Imee pictured for us, as we went along, the happiness, the gratefulness of her people. Already, she informed us, great numbers of young men were clearing away the bodies of the dead Rorn. She was so happy she could hardly restrain herself.

A dim skeleton shape bulked up at my left. I turned to look at it, and Imee, watching me through the lights of my head-piece, nodded and smiled.

Yes, this was the very hulk by which she had been swimming when the shark had attacked her, the shark which had been the cause of the accident. She darted on to show me the very rib upon which her head had struck, stunning her so that she had drifted, unconscious and storm-tossed, to the shore of Mercer's estate.

I studied the wreck. It was battered and tilted on its

beam ends, but I could still make out the high poop that marked it as a very old ship.

"A Spanish galleon, Mercer," I conjectured.

"I believe so." And then, in pictured form, for Imee's benefit, "It has been here while much time passed?"

"Yes." Imee came darting back to us, smiling. "Since before the Teemorn, my people were here. A Rorn we made prisoner once told us his people discovered it first. They went into this strange skeleton, and inside were many blocks of very bright stone." She pictured quite clearly bars of dully-glinting bullion. Evidently the captive had told his story well.

"These stones, which were so bright, the Rorn took to their city, which is three swims distant." How far that might be, I could not even guess. A swim, it seemed, was the distance a Teemorn could travel before the need for rest became imperative. "There were many Rorn, and they each took one stone. And of them, they made a house for their leader." The leader, as she pictured him, being the most hideous travesty of a

thing in semi-human form that the mind could imagine: incredibly old and wrinkled and ugly and gray, his noseless face seamed with cunning, his eyes red rimmed and terrible, his teeth gleaming, white and sharp, like fangs.

"A whole house, except the roof," she went on. "It is there now, and it is gazed at with much admiration by all the Rorn. All this our prisoner told us before we took him, with a rock made fast to him, out over the Place of Darkness. He, too, was very proud of their leader's house."

"Treasure!" I commented to Mercer. "If we could find the city of the Rorn, we might make the trip pay for itself!"

I could sense his wave of amusement.

"I think," he replied, "I'd rather stand it myself. These Rorn don't appeal to me."

It was over half an hour before we were at last free of our diving suits.

The first thing Captain Bonnett said:

"We've got to get to the surface, and that quickly. Our air supply is running damnably low. By the time we blow out the tanks we'll be just about out. And foul air will keep us here until we rot. I'm sorry, sir, but that's the way matters stand."

Mercer, white-faced and ill, stared at him dazedly.

"Air?" he repeated groggily—I knew just how he felt —"We should have lots of air. The specifications—"

"But we're dealing with facts, not specifications, sir," said Captain Bonnett. "Another two hours here and we won't leave ever."

"Then it can't be helped, Captain," muttered Mercer. "We'll go up. And back. For more compressed air. We must remember to plot our course exactly. You kept the record on the way out as I instructed you?"

"Yes, sir," said Captain Bonnett.

"Just a minute, then," said Mercer.

Weakly he made his way forward to the little cubbyhole in which was housed the central station of his thought-telegraph. I didn't even inspect the gleaming maze of apparatus. I merely watched him dully as he plugged in an antenna similar to the one we had left with Imee, and adjusted the things on his head.

His eyes brightened instantly. "She's still wearing her antenna," he said swiftly over his shoulder. "I'll tell her that something's happened; we must leave, but that we will return."

He sat there, frowning intently for a moment, and then dragged the antenna wearily from his head. He touched a switch somewhere, and several softly glowing bulbs turned slowly red and then dark.

"You and I," he groaned, "had better go to bed. We overdid it. She understands, I think. Terribly sorry, terribly disappointed. Some sort of celebration planned, I gather. Captain Bonnett!"

"Yes, sir?"

"You may proceed now as you think best," said Mercer. "We're retiring. Be sure and chart the course back, so we may locate this spot again."

"Yes, sir!" said Captain Bonnett.

When I awoke we were at anchor, our deck barely awash, before the deserted beach of Mercer's estate. Still feeling none too well, Mercer and I made our way to the narrow deck.

Captain Bonnett was waiting for us, spruce in his blue uniform, his shoulders bowed as always.

"Good morning, gentlemen," he offered, smiling crisply. "The open air seems good, doesn't it?"

It did. There was a fresh breeze blowing in from the Atlantic, and I filled my lungs gratefully. I had not realized until that instant just how foul the air below had been.

"Very fine, Captain," said Mercer, nodding. "You have signaled the men on shore to send out a boat to take us off?"

"Yes, sir; I believe they're launching her now."

"And the chart of our course—did the return trip check with the other?"

"Perfectly, sir." Captain Bonnett reached in an inner pocket of his double-breasted coat, extracted two folded pages, and extended them, with a little bow, to Mercer.

Just as Mercer's eager fingers touched the precious papers, however, the wind whisked them from Bonnett's grasp and whirled them into the water.

Bonnett gasped and gazed after them for a split second; then, barely pausing to tear off his coat, he plunged over the side.

He tried desperately, but before he could reach either one of the tossing white specks, they were washed

beneath the surface and disappeared. Ten minutes later, his uniform bedraggled and shapeless, he pulled himself on deck.

"I'm sorry, sir," he gasped, out of breath. "Sorrier than I can say. I tried—"

Mercer, white-faced and struggling with his emotions, looked down and turned away.

"You don't remember the bearings, I suppose?" he ventured tonelessly.

"I'm sorry—no."

"Thank you, Captain, for trying so hard to recover the papers," said Mercer. "You'd better change at once; the wind is sharp."

The captain bowed and disappeared down the conning tower. Then Mercer turned to me, and a smile struggled for life.

"Well, Taylor, we helped her out, anyway," he said

slowly. "I'm sorry that—that Imee will misunderstand when we don't come back."

"But, Mercer," I said swiftly, "perhaps we'll be able to find our way back to her. You thought before, you know, that—"

"But I can see now what an utterly wild-goose chase it would have been." Mercer shook his head slowly. "No, old friend, it would be impossible. And—Imee will not come again to guide us; she will think we have deserted her. And"—he smiled slowly up into my eyes—"perhaps it is as well. After all, the photographs and the data I wanted would do the world no practical good. We did Imee and her people a good turn; let's content ourselves with that. I, for one, am satisfied."

"And I, old timer," I said, placing my hand affectionately upon his shoulder. "Here's the boat. Shall we go ashore?"

We did go ashore, silently. And as we got out of the boat, and set foot again upon the sand, we both turned and looked out across the smiling Atlantic,

dancing brightly in the sun.

The mighty, mysterious Atlantic—home of Imee and her people!